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**Brexit Update**

Despite the UK government securing a [revised protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland](https://www.bma.org.uk/news/brexit-update) in the draft withdrawal agreement and an [amended political declaration](https://www.bma.org.uk/news/brexit-update), it was unable to secure the UK’s departure from the EU by the 31 October deadline.

Subsequently, and being cognisant of the dangers that a No Deal Brexit posed to the European medical profession, the UK has accepted the EU’s offer of a “flextension” – which means that the UK could leave before the deadline if a deal is approved by its Parliament.

Accordingly, and as ratification of the draft withdrawal agreement would lead to negotiations on the exact nature of the future relationship between the UK and EU27, we continue to engage with key decision makers on both sides of the channel in order to ensure that they remain cognisant of our members’ concerns.

For example, with [Dr Petra De Sutter MEP](https://www.bma.org.uk/news/brexit-update), a medical doctor and Chair of the EP’s (European Parliament) Internal Market Committee – which, to quote its President, will lead the EP’s work on securing:

> The rights of EU and UK citizens, in particular as regards the recognition of their professional qualifications and the right to practice a profession.

Likewise, and as [the risk of a No Deal Brexit remains](https://www.bma.org.uk/news/brexit-update), we also continue (see July and September 2019 editions) to work with our European partners to encourage them to work with their members’ respective governments to replicate UK legislation which means that:

> in the event of a no deal Brexit, the UK will continue to accept the vast majority of EEA qualifications that are listed in Annex V of the Professional Qualifications Directive on exit day as sufficient evidence of knowledge, skills and experience for entry onto the UK’s medical register.

Further details about our extensive work on this key issue are available [here](https://www.bma.org.uk/news/brexit-update).
BMA Hosts Europe’s Medical Specialists
Falling on the same day that MPs were due to vote on the revised (Brexit) withdrawal agreement, the BMA was proud to host our partner’s - the UEMS (European Union of Medical Specialists) – Council meeting with Dr Tom Coffey, Health Advisor to the Mayor of London, welcoming delegates to the city. Addressing delegates from over 30 European countries, Dr Chaand Nagpaul, Chair of BMA Council, opened the meeting by reiterating the BMA’s opposition to Brexit and stating that:

No matter what decisions politicians take in the coming days and weeks, we now know that we as doctors will stand shoulder to shoulder and put unity and the interests of our patients first.

In addition to their regular business of developing specialist medical curricula, delegates elected Professor Vassilios Papalois – a BMA member and transplant surgeon based in London, who hails from Greece – as its President.
The conference also saw a number of awards granted in recognition of service to the UEMS, including one to the BMA international committee deputy chair, Professor Andrew Rowland.
Professor Rowland, who is a consultant in paediatric emergency medicine, has served as the UK’s head of delegation to UEMS since 2013 and will be stepping down at the end of this year.

New EU Health Commissioner Responds to BMA Questions on Cancer Prevention
Cypriot nominee, Stella Kyriakides, was officially appointed as the EU’s new Health Commissioner earlier this month, after receiving formal approval from the EP’s Public Health Committee. Commissioner Kyriakides; a trained medical psychiatrist and former President of a European breast cancer organisation, demonstrated her grasp on the health and food safety portfolio to which she has been assigned during a three-hour long confirmatory hearing in the Parliament.
The new Commissioner gave particularly strong answers when responding to questions submitted by the BMA about how she plans to ensure prevention is a central part of the new EU Beating Cancer Plan. Having survived the disease herself, she made clear the new EU Cancer Plan will require a wide-ranging “all-hands-on desk” approach, involving sustained investment in new research, as well as targeted information campaigns around the different factors relating to prevention. She argued there is a need to invest in changing lifestyles; and that she will have “no qualms taking up those (industry-backed interests) who are not in favour of moving in the right direction.”
The BMA’s European Office will be scheduling meetings with the Health Commissioner’s new team in the next few months to ensure that, in relation to Brexit and a range of other pressing challenges, the voice of UK doctors continues to be heard at EU level.

Health Champions in the European Parliament
A recent event in the EP, co-hosted by the BMA’s partner, the CPME (Standing Committee of European Doctors), sparked a lively debate on what will be the most pressing health policy priorities in the next mandate of the European institutions.
The debate came just a few weeks after the new EP swung back into action after the elections and was a timely opportunity for EU health stakeholders and policymakers to discuss how member states can bring added value to EU efforts to coordinate health policy.
Speaking ahead of the event, co-host MEP Dr Peter Liese said: “When we wish people something good for their anniversary or for the New Year, we always say that health is the most important. That is why politics at all levels should make health a priority. While many areas are in the responsibility of the Member States, there is a lot of responsibility for the European Union too, according to the treaties.”
Applications open for European Reference Networks
The European Commission has launched a call for applications, open until the end of November, for new members to join its existing 24 European Reference Networks (ERNs).
UK healthcare providers wishing to apply to this round of applications can read NHS advice related to the ongoing application process here.
ERNs are cross-border networks bringing together centres of expertise of European hospitals to pool knowledge in order to tackle rare complex diseases and conditions that require highly specialised healthcare.
The NHS is currently an active member in 23 of 24 ERNs, with UK hospitals coordinating six of these networks. However, with the future UK-EU relationship still unknown, the UK’s continued involvement in these networks post-Brexit is still uncertain.
Given that a hard or no deal Brexit has the potential to limit the benefits of this collaborative approach and presents a substantial risk to the continued success of European medical research, the BMA will continue to call on UK and EU negotiators to prioritise the ability for the UK and EU to continue coordinating research and development activities. More information on what is at stake and our work on this issue to date can be found in our Medical Research Brexit Briefing.

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EU doctors Signal Support for New Irish Alcohol Bill
In a recent statement, BMA’s European Partner CPME, which also represents the Irish Medical Organisation, welcomed the measures contained in the Irish Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018.
The new legislation lays down stricter regulation of promotional activity around alcohol; prohibiting loyalty cards, short-term price promotions, and the sale of alcohol products at a reduced price or free of charge on the purchase of another product or service. “Alcohol is a drug and one which has real risks and harms associated with it and as such, should not be a subject of promotional activity,” Irish Health Minister Simon Harris wrote in a press release.
The EC now has three months to provide an assessment of these plans and to alert the Irish government to any potential conflict with the EU’s single market rules.
The BMA, both independently and together with its European partners, will continue to contribute to the EU debate on the fight against alcohol-related harm, and advocate for the unique and valuable role doctors have in such actions.

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A Fresh Look at EU Rules on Blood, Tissues and Cells?
The EC has published a new evaluation of the current EU safety and quality requirements for the collection and handling of blood, tissues and cells, prompting speculation of an upcoming revision to the legislation. The evaluation (executive summary here) highlights a number of flaws in the current rules; that provisions are “outdated” and the legal framework “cannot keep up with the high level of innovation”, which would help reduce costs in the sector. The study also points out that requirements for national oversight aren’t strict enough, leading to a lack of mutual trust amongst EU countries, and that some sections of the population (principally, donors and children born from donations) are not afforded adequate protections.
Finally, the study highlights that the current rules do not ensure sustainability of the system, meaning the EU is reliant on imports, particularly of plasma, from the US.
The EC presented the findings at a public hearing in Brussels, attended by the BMA, whereby a range of professional, patient and regulatory authorities expressed their views and suggestions regarding how to revise future EU rules. The EC will take a decision later this year as to whether the legislation will undergo a full review.
Acknowledging the importance of the proper regulation of such substances for innovative and sustainable European healthcare systems, as well as the likely impact Brexit will have on the UK’s own supply of such material, the BMA will continue to monitor the follow up to this study and scrutinize any new EU legislative changes in the pipeline.